

TOP 10

Ten questions every board director needs to ask about child safety

Everyone has a role to play in preventing and responding to child abuse. As a director of a not-for-profit organisation, one of your duties is to satisfy yourself that your organisation is doing the right thing in this regard – you should do this because you actually care about the safety of children, but also because it's your responsibility to make sure your organisation is operating within the law, and to protect your organisation from financial and reputational damage.

Below is a list of questions you can ask that will help you satisfy yourself that your organisation is doing the right thing. It's not a prescription – you should amend the list to suit the particular circumstances of your organisation.

The mere fact of asking these questions is likely to spur action, if that's needed, but you should pay careful attention to the answers you receive and dig deeper if you're not satisfied with the responses.

1. Policy

Do we need a child safety policy? When was the last time we reviewed our child safety policy?

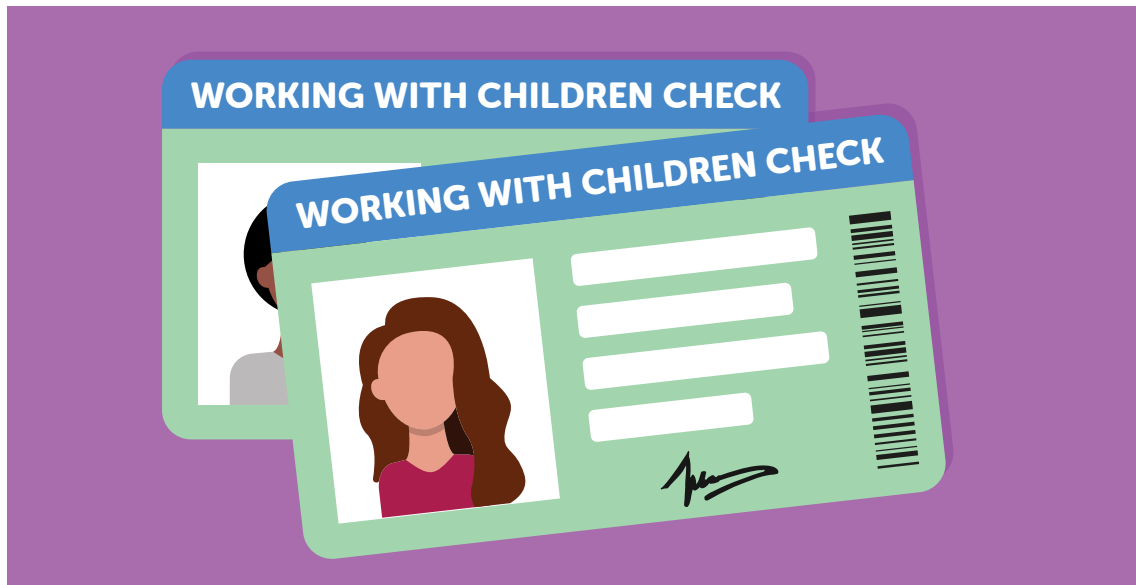
Why should I ask this? If your organisation works with children or if your volunteers occasionally work with children or may be around children while working, then you need a child safety policy. One way to test this is to ask: do your volunteers or staff require a Working With Children Check (Blue Card)? If the answer is yes, then you need a child safety policy.

If your organisation needs to have a child safety policy, then that policy needs to be reviewed each year and updated with relevant changes, including those required to reflect changes in legislation.

2. Accountability

Do we need to have a child safety officer? If yes, do we have one? Who is it? Do all new and existing staff know who it is?

Why should I ask this? If your organisation works with children or if your volunteers occasionally work with children or are around children while working, then you need a child safety policy, and in any policy you will need to assign a child safety officer. One way to test this is to ask: do your volunteers or staff require a Working With Children Check (Blue Card)? If the answer is yes, then you need a child safety officer.



3. Reporting

What happens when a child safety concern is reported? Are reports required to be made in writing?

Where are they stored? Is there a register? Is it brought to the board or to a risk and audit committee for review? Who signs off that it has been reviewed and follow-up actions have been completed?

Why should I ask this? Maintaining clear records enables you as the board to ensure cases are responded to and closed, rather than left languishing. The records may also show patterns that require attention. The records help to keep you accountable and help to protect children, staff, volunteers, board members and the organisation.

4. Recruitment

Do we advertise that we are a child safe organisation requiring a Working with Children Check when we publish recruitment advertisements? Do we include this information in all position descriptions?

Why should I ask this? These mechanisms are thought to help prevent people who exhibit unsafe behaviour towards children from targeting your organisation as a potential place of employment.

5. Inductions

How is child safety addressed in the induction process for new staff, volunteers and board members?

Does the process include a session with the child safety officer? Is the child safety policy one of many policies staff, volunteers and board directors must navigate or is it highlighted separately for particular attention?

Why should I ask this? Induction is the most important aspect of training. It sends the message, “This is what is important to us as an organisation.”

6. Training

Is training about the child safety policy delivered annually to all staff and board members?

Is there a register of those who have completed training?

Why should I ask this? Remember that merely having a policy is inadequate if training on the policy is not delivered regularly. Each time the policy is reviewed – which should happen regularly – renewed training will need to be delivered too.



7. Working With Children Checks and National Police Checks

Do we have a register of Working With Children Checks and expiry dates? Who is responsible for ensuring that anyone whose WWCC is nearing expiry applies for a new one? Working With Children Checks and National Police Checks cover different offences. Are staff and board members required to have both?

Why should I ask this? A check is only as good as its expiry date. If you do not keep clear records then problems can go unnoticed.

8. Culture

Do the organisation's practices work to create a culture of safety for children? What scope is there for improvement? Do the practices meet state guidelines?

Why should I ask this? Culture is an important component of the national standards for child safe organisations and of state standards. Child safety is not just about following legislative rules, it's about creating an environment of safety in whatever way makes sense in your context.

9. Child's voice

Do the organisation's practices incorporate opportunities to hear and elevate children's voices? What scope is there for improvement?

Why should I ask this? Children should be seen and heard. "The child's voice" means children contributing to the way decisions are made in your organisation, and this increases the chances of children feeling comfortable to highlight when there is a problem of safety.



10. Embedded practice

Is child safety a standing agenda item at staff meetings and board meetings, creating a permanent space in which questions, updates and incidents can be raised?

Why should I ask this? This practice makes child safety part of the culture of your organisation. It means the organisation doesn't need to rely on one or a few current staff and board members to raise it. As a standing agenda item, it will remain after individuals move on.